



7 Essential Exercises

For

Effective Communication with the Driving Horse

By

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The **Check Yourself!** Routine

- ❖ To be repeated about every 5 minutes
- ❖ Start with the feet
 - One foot forward, one foot back
 - Lift them off the floor
- ❖ Set them back down. Rest them lightly on the floor.
 - Let gravity keep you in the seat.
 - Do not push with your forward foot.
 - Bracing is ok if it is necessary
 - In Hazards, Cones, not in Dressage or just driving down the road.
- ❖ Work your way up your leg, your knees, your thighs to your pelvis, relaxing tension.
- ❖ Let the motion of the cart move you.
 - Become a Hula Dancer, starting where your spine joins your pelvis.
 - Interface between the movement of the wheels over the terrain and your hands.
- ❖ Feel the back rest, do not push into it.
- ❖ Do a shoulder roll or 2.
- ❖ Pull your shoulders back, open your chest
- ❖ Elbows hang by your sides, even with the front of your rib cage.
- ❖ Hands as far apart as your shoulders and over your knees
 - Achenbach vs 2 handed rein method
 - 2 handed method: Origin of the motion of your rein movement should come from the spine-side edge of your shoulder blade.
- ❖ Hands held slightly higher than your elbow.
 - Do not pull down.
- ❖ Whip in your right hand at 45 degrees to the left side and 45 degrees forward.
 - Can you reach the parts of the Horse you need to without compromising your posture?
 - Longer stick with shorter lash may work better than a shorter stick, longer lash.
 - Balanced well in the hand, i.e. Not top-heavy
- ❖ Head Balanced on top of your neck
- ❖ Check where you are looking. Move 'Looking' up in priority over time.
- ❖ REPEAT APPROXIMATELY EVERY 5 MINUTES!

What does this teach?

For the Driver: The Driver learns the importance of regularly reminding himself **to maintain correct posture** for the type of driving being done. Correct posture and **body control is not automatic** and is subverted by the efforts to try to correct the issues of the Horse. The Driver achieves **the most responsive posture** for communication. The more correct the Driver is, the more correct the Horse will become. Aids in establishing and maintaining **the Labor/Management Relationship**.

For the Horse: The Horse will benefit from the Driver achieving the correct posture to establish and maintain **the Labor/Management Relationship** because it is the only posture in which it is possible for the Driver **to issue pure instruction** without interfering with or disrupting the Balance and self carriage of the Horse.

Eye Spy

- ❖ Practice on a 40 meter circle.
- ❖ Look up and around.
- ❖ Do not look at your Horse.
- ❖ Be mindful of the Horse underneath the center of your visual field
 - In the bottom quarter of your vision.
 - See his ears?
 - What else can you see?
 - Look above the horizon
- ❖ ‘See’ at where you wish to end up without staring at it.
 - See halfway around.
 - See $\frac{1}{4}$ way around.
 - See $\frac{1}{2}$ way around.
 - See $\frac{1}{4}$ way around
 - Then $\frac{3}{4}$ way around. Etc
 - Seeing back and forth as you go around the circle.
- ❖ If you find that you can’t stop staring at the back of your Horse’s head, tape/tie a piece of bright ribbon to the water hook on the saddle. It will remind you “Not to Look There!”

What does this teach?

The Driver: Trains the Driver to use their **peripheral vision**, to focus on **where** they are going and **how** they will get there, **to drive by Feel**, to feel **what ‘round’ is**, to **prepare**.

The Horse: The Horse will also focus his attention on **where** he is going and **how** he will get there, will benefit by being **better prepared** because the farther in advance he is adequately prepared, the easier it is for him to **maintain his Balance** and the **more energy** he can devote to his movement.

Driving Blind

- ❖ Find a field with no obstacles, holes, etc
- ❖ Bring your Horse to a point where he is driving responsively.
 - Check Yourself.
 - Close your eyes.
 - You can open them in a split second.
 - There are no Peaking Police.
 - Focus first on yourself.
 - Check Yourself. – AGAIN!
 - More effective with your eyes closed.
 - What can you feel?
- ❖ Drive with your eyes open.
- ❖ Then close your eyes and focus on your Horse.
 - What you can feel?
 - What can you hear?
- ❖ Open your eyes.
- ❖ Keep your eyes off your horse.
- ❖ Drive the cart.
 - Drive the cart to where you want it to go; do not drive the Horse.
 - If the cart ends up in the right place, your Horse will have been in the right place.

What does this teach?

The Driver: This is the best exercise to learn how **to drive by Feel**. The Driver learns how much information is being transmitted to him all the time through the senses at his disposal other than Sight. He learns **to trust** and use these other sources of information. He will learn **to sense incorrectness** in his Horse before it becomes a big problem requiring a big correction.

The Horse: The Horse will immediately **relax** when the Driver begins to focus on what he can **feel** rather than what he is anticipating when relying on his sight. The Horse will experience **increased responsiveness** and sensitivity in his mouth and as a result, also throughout his entire body.

Performance will improve as the quality of input from the Driver becomes more sympathetic to the needs of the Horse.

Squinting and Blurring

- ❖ Check Yourself.
 - Especially where you are looking: Up and away.
- ❖ Let gravity keep you in the seat.
- ❖ Let the motion of the cart move you.
- ❖ Squint or, if you can, take your eyes out of focus. Blur your vision.
- ❖ Breath out/blow out in rhythm with your Horse.
- ❖ What can you Feel?
- ❖ Drive a shortened version of your test or drive the problem movements.
- ❖ Do it at home first so you are comfortable with driving this way.
- ❖ See if you can drive an entire test this way.

What does this teach?

For the Driver: This technique teaches the Driver to trust and **rely on what he can feel**. When the Driver can feel when his Horse is correct, he will instantly know, without having to look or even think, when the Horse is incorrect and deliver the right instructions. He can **react faster** and thus allow the Horse less time to make the mistake even worse. **Little mistakes require little corrections**. Big mistakes require bigger corrections.

For the Horse: The Horse benefits from this technique because the Driver becomes more **sensitive to his Balance, rhythm, and tempo**. The movement of the wheel across the ground is absorbed more by the Driver and not transferred to the Horse's mouth. This allows for **clearer and cleaner communication** with the bit.

Lets Make a Deal

The Essential Exercise

The Deal: The Horse gets to move your hand with his mouth in exchange for you getting to move and control his head and neck.

- When the Horse offers to move his mouth (head and neck) down and forward, you absolutely must allow your hand to be moved by his mouth.
 - Even if it temporarily takes you out of the ideal driving position.
 - We have no method of pushing or pulling his head and neck down and forward.
 - All we can do is allow him to offer it and encourage him when he does by not blocking that offering.
 - Block it once and he will be less inclined to offer a second time.
 - This down and forward position for a flight animal like the Horse is relaxing, content, vulnerable, trusting.
 - Allows the Horse to take a longer, more efficient stride.
 - If he travels too long and low, he will only do so for a short while because that is not an efficient position in which to pull a vehicle.
 - By allowing him to experiment down and forward, he will eventually discover the most efficient frame *for his conformation and development* in which to do the job.
 - Do not pull or force him into a “frame”.
 - He can not Balance if he is pulled, held or forced.
- ❖ Constantly remind yourself to lighten your hand forward.
- Give forward with your hand till you feel his mouth disappear.
 - Then rest your hand on his mouth and allow the movement of his mouth to move your hand.

What does this teach?

The Driver: The Driver learns give the Horse the opportunity and to not interfere with his effort **to achieve self carriage**. It is an integral part of establishing and maintaining **the Labor/Management Relationship**. It allows the Driver to achieve a relaxed driving posture and **to avoid a defensive posture**. He can not drive defensively with a light, giving, offering hand.

The Horse: The Horse learns **to achieve self carriage** and to assume his correct role in **the Labor/Management Relationship**. He learns to find **the most efficient position** in which to pull the vehicle for his conformation and muscle development. He learns **to pay attention** to quiet, subtle instruction in his mouth with the bit. He learns **to not be afraid** of the bit and **to trust** the instructions. He gains confidence in his role because it is clearer to him what it is.

Figure 8

- ❖ Best done in a dressage ring to help encourage precision.
- ❖ Best done on level ground with good footing.
 - Removes some anxiety for the Horse about where and how his feet are put down.
 - Removes issues of balancing up and down hill.
 - Slightly up and downhill can be a good thing to teach him about Balance.
- ❖ Best to have enough room for least two 20 meter circles side by side,
 - Four 20's inside a 40 meter square works REALLY well.
- ❖ To Start: Check Yourself! Walk in 20 meter Circle in either direction.
 - Doesn't matter which way, although usually best to start in his good direction.
 - Vary which direction you begin over time.
 - Larger is ok, smaller probably not better.
- ❖ Encourage your Horse to be precise. Do not let him decide where he is going.
- ❖ **You have 3 Rules to enforce:**
 - **The Horse must look inside the circle.**
 - **The Horse can not change the speed at which you ask him to travel, neither up nor down.**
 - **The Horse can reach down and forward all he wants.**
 - **He is free to explore. You can not hold or support him with your hand.**
 - **Note: no rule about size of the circle**
- ❖ Your outside rein is your friend.
 - Inside Rein asks the Horse to look inside.
 - Outside Rein Half Halt when the inside hind foot leaves the ground.
 - Outside Rein Half Halts asks your Horse to shift his center of Balance laterally, to his outside, then tells him to 'Keep it there, Keep it there....'
- ❖ When all 3 rules are being followed well, change direction thru the center of the Figure 8.
- ❖ Repeat in the 2nd direction until all the rules are being followed.
- ❖ Change direction randomly so the Horse does not change every time he comes to the center.
- ❖ If the rules fall apart, stay in that direction until re-established.
- ❖ Constantly Check Yourself! And then play Eye Spy and Squinting/Blurring.
- ❖ Move up to the Trot. ~ Same Rules apply.
- ❖ Flip the Figure 8 by staying straight to get to the next circle instead of changing direction thru the middle.
- ❖ Add more 20 meter circles.
 - With four circles you can drive four Figure 8's and flip them any number of ways by occasionally driving straight to the next circle.
 - Divide your 40 meter square with center lines and quarter lines.
 - Change direction every quarter circle thru the center. (from quarter line to center line to quarter line)
 - You can add halts down center lines.

What does this teach?

The Driver: Timing and precision of instruction due to limited strides. Every stride must count and be correct. On a circle every stride is the same as the one the Horse just took and the one he is about to take. The Driver readily learns precision in giving instruction because their mistakes show up rather dramatically. The circle is no longer round, the Horse falls out of Balance – side to side, front to back. The geometric precision of the dressage ring enables mistakes to be seen and forces a more precise performance. It's worth developing the habit of being precise.

The Horse: Balance: the Horse readily learns about balancing himself because when he guesses correctly, his job is immediately and noticeably made easier for him. The real value comes in the center of the Figure 8 when the Horse must shift his center of Balance from one side to his center to the other side. He must accomplish this in only a few strides, ideally 3. He learns **to pay attention** to your instructions because the more he responds correctly, the easier his job becomes.

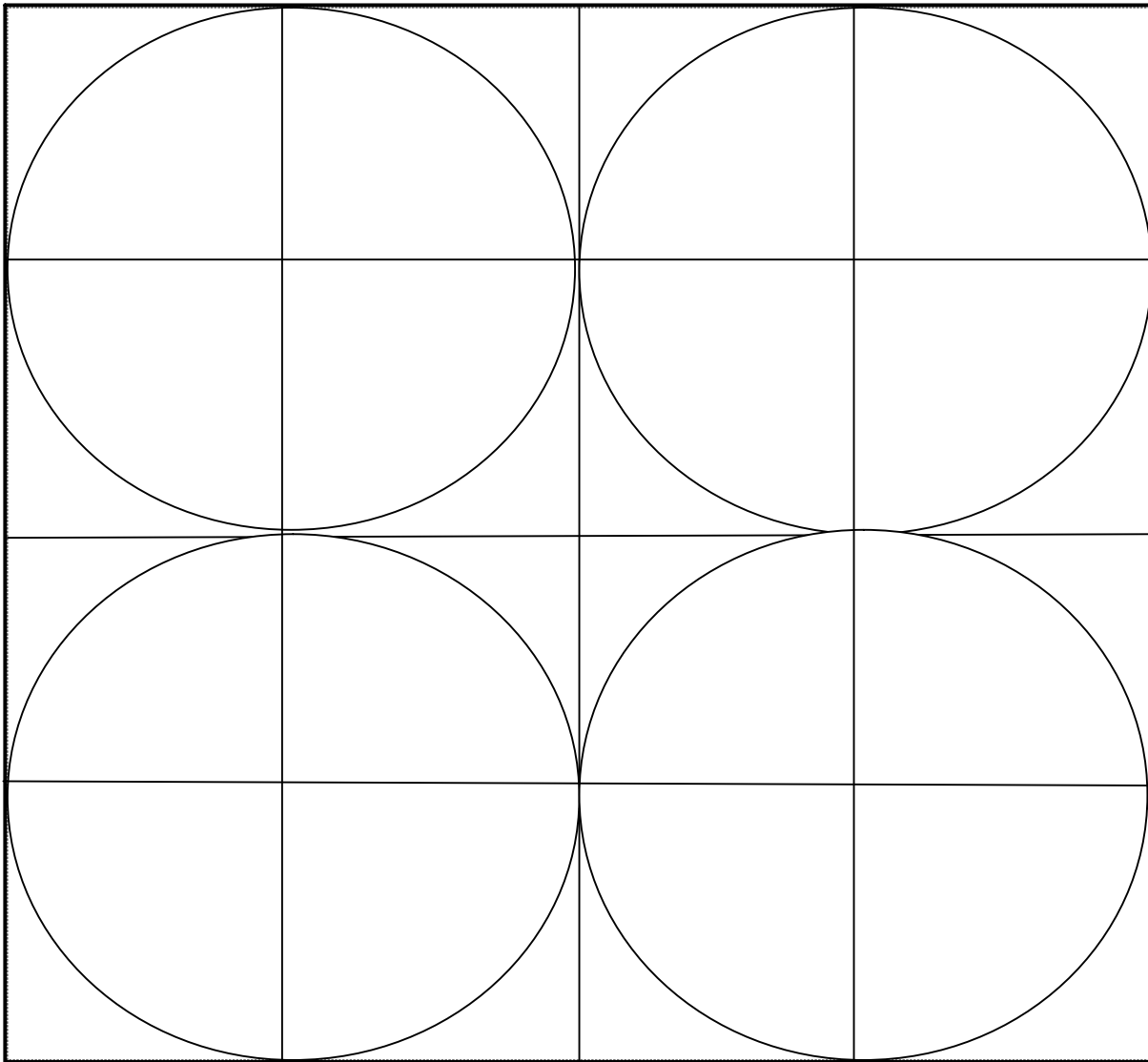


Figure 8 Map
Four 20 Meter Circles inside a 40 meter Square
Center Lines in two directions
4 Quarterlines

Loop and Wave

- ❖ Best done starting on the short side of a dressage ring.
- ❖ Best done with a fence or barrier of some kind.
 - Rails on the ground., Dressage chain
- ❖ Check yourself.
- ❖ Begin at the Walk.
- ❖ Walk deep into the corner
- ❖ Continue in a tight turn all the way around to the short side.
- ❖ Turn back to travel straight into the opposite corner
- ❖ Continue in a tight turn back to the short side
- ❖ Turn back to travel straight.
- ❖ Repeat.
- ❖ Change to the Trot and repeat.
- ❖ Can be extended to a Wave around the inside of a full dressage ring.
 - Really, a series of shallow deviations.
 - Maybe with Loops in the corners.
 - Maybe with a 20 meter circle thrown in somewhere.

What does this teach?

The Driver: Your goal is to **manage every stride**. **Timing of instruction** is improved.

The Horse: The Horse will learn to **find the most efficient positioning** for his front feet and hind legs, in particular, because with so few strides, every stride counts.

Response to instruction by the Horse is improved. **Patience** is improved. Forward Horses learn **to wait to be driven**.

Note from the Author:

If you have **any** questions, suggestions or comments on this material, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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